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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the knowledge afforded man from research into personality. Approaching his topic from a position valuing the study of persons from complementary psychological perspectives, the author attempts to derive some conclusion about human behavior and personality. He discusses the findings that there is basic continuity in personality; each person is capable of great differentiation in behavior; there are multiple determinants of human behavior; and there is a need to analyze social and psychological environments in order to understand individual behavior. From this common ground, the author suggests the need to specify clearly the goals, purposes and objectives of personality research. Different goals require different foci and different measurement strategies. The author views humans as active organisms interacting in active environments, where person variables must be taken into account so as to understand this interaction. In conclusion, the author suggests that researchers actively involve subjects in their own personality assessments, that information processing may yield increased knowledge of personality, and that a synthesis of various psychological constructs is needed. He further suggests an image of man as an active, aware problem-solver who is multi-faceted, multiply influenced, uniquely organized, yet open to study by scientific methods. (SJL)

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On the Future of Personality Measurement

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My look at the future of personality measurement begins by asking what are some of the main lessons we have learned--or should have learned--from its past.

Continuity in people; discriminativeness in behavior

One lesson that should have been well learned long ago is that arguments about the existence of coherence and basic continuity in personality are gratuitous at this point: I know no one who seriously doubts that lives have coherence and that we perceive ourselves and others as relatively stable individuals who have substantial identity and continuity over time, even when our specific actions change.

Jack Block's (1975) review documents impressively the coherence and continuity of personality. For me, the surprising part of his scholarly survey is that he seems to assume I would disagree with his assessment of the state of the data on consistency issues. Although our emphasis and language differ, Block's appraisal of the data in 1975 appears basically congruent with mine in 1968 and now. We do differ, however, in the implications we draw from those data.

Block concludes, first, that appreciable continuity over long periods of time is found in well-done studies using L-data (personality ratings by observers) and S-data (self-ratings); moreover, these two types of data may be (and often are) significantly related. I agree. Temporal consistency

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and agreement among judges in personality ratings--by self and by others--is not and was not in dispute.

Block stresses that the patterns for L and S data, and their links, demonstrate that continuity and consistency "reside within the individuals being studied." Here our emphasis differs, but perhaps not crucially. I prefer to stress the active cognitive constructions that underlie complex social perceptions, not to belittle the "reality" of personality but to underline its complexity. I am not dismissing perceived consistencies in human qualities as artifacts or fictions by emphasizing their cognitive, constructive nature anymore than an emphasis on the constructive nature of "perceived constancies" in the perception of stable size and shape implies an unreal physical world. Cognitive psychologists tell us (e.g., Neisser, 1967; Lindsay & Norman, 1972), that even as simple an act as recognizing the letter "A" involves an active cognitive construction (not a mere reading of what is "really there"). Then surely the far more complicated perception of personal consistency in ourselves and others also requires an active imposition of order--a jump beyond the information given to construct the essential underlying gist of meaning from the host of behavioral fragments we observe. Human information processing--whether in the recognition of a best friend's enduring "warmth" or of the word "warmth" on the printed page--involves continuous interactions between what is "out there" in the world of "stimuli" and what is "in here" in the head of the perceiver.

Consequently, it may not be possible to assign the residence of dispositions exclusively either to the actor or to the perceiver; we may have to settle for a continuous interaction between observed and observer, for a reality that is constructed and cognitively created but not fictitious. In such a construction process, semantic networks are likely to figure heavily

(e.g., D'Andrade, 1970, 1973; Shweder, 1972), and "prototypes" or "schemata" may be generated that permit a wide range of distortions and transformations in specific instances and still yield consistent agreement among observers about the underlying gist. Research by Posner and Keele (1968) and others (e.g., Shaw & Wilson, 1974) seems highly suggestive here. Their work indicates that subjects readily and reliably learn the "central tendency" and variability of a given pattern, abstracting information about the basic schema from the specific stored instances with great efficiency. Such research on the genesis of abstract ideas ultimately should prove highly relevant for understanding the perception of personality. When we understand how people recognize the basic prototype underlying numerous transformations of a physical pattern, presumably we will also be well on the way to understanding how diverse behaviors may be judged as instances of the same basic disposition.

And then we will, I think, also find ourselves right at the interface between personality psychology and cognitive psychology where, I suspect, some of the most difficult, challenging, and exciting problems of our area might emerge. Guided by that belief, my students and I are now devoting much of our time to studies of when and how the layman uses traits or other ways of categorizing information about people, and what the consequences (e.g., for memory, for prediction) might be of alternative types of categorization (e.g., Mischel, Jeffery, & Patterson, 1974; Jeffery & Mischel, 1975).

In sum, while coherence in personality is not in dispute, this perceived continuity exists side-by-side with the equally compelling evidence that complex human behavior is regulated by interactions that depend intimately on situational conditions (stimulus variables) as well as on dispositions.

People are capable of great differentiation in their behavior, and they show extraordinary adaptiveness and discrimination as they cope with a changing environment. It is this behavioral discriminativeness, in my view, that accounts for the difficulty in demonstrating impressive cross-situational consistency when ongoing behavior is studied objectively, i.e., in the domain of so-called "T-data," rather than by trait ratings. Indeed, Jack Block (1975) himself concludes that T-data (based on standardized, objective, specific measures of ongoing behavior) tend to provide "extremely erratic" consistency evidence and are related to L-data (personality ratings by observers) and S-data (self-ratings) in "uneven" ways.

It is possible to see these limitations of T-data as reflecting the triviality and artificiality of most objective measures of ongoing behavior. But for me the implications are very different. The discriminativeness ("specificity") of behavior as it unfolds in diverse situations in vivo merits serious attention at least as much as the consistencies we construct from it over time. An important test--although surely not the only one--of the utility of constructs about personality dispositions remains their ability to predict the individual's behavior in specific situations. Unless L and S data predict T data appreciably, the links between trait impressions and specific behavior-in-situations remain tenuous.

While traditional trait ratings may serve as summaries in everyday language of the gist of our impressions of each other, they do not capture the interactions between persons and conditions as the ongoing behavior is generated. And they certainly do not illuminate the causes of behavior. Indeed, as Wiggins (1974) has said, traits are "lost causes" because they require, rather than provide, scientific explanation. And the development of progressively better explanations for them will remain one of the main

tasks of our field. In sum, a recognition of the perceived continuity and coherence of personality attributes must coexist with the finding of "specficity" at the behavioral level. This so-called "specificity" may be viewed as reflecting man's discriminative facility, not merely the biases of faulty measurement (Mischel, 1968, 1973).

Multiple determinism of behavior and "contextualism"

Closely related to the discriminativeness of behavior is its multiple causation. For me, one of the most impressive--and obvious--lessons from our history is the recognition that complex human behavior tends to be influenced by many determinants and reflects the almost inseparable and continuous interaction of a host of variables both in the person and in the situation. In the abstract, this recognition seems as bland and obvious as a cliché, and one wonders if a focus on "interactionism" and multiple determinism may not be little more than new slogans for old verities. But when examined more concretely, there may be deeper implications that I sense are being felt independently in many other areas of psychology and even in the social sciences more generally.

Namely, if human behavior is determined by many interacting variables--both in the person and in the environment--then a focus on any one of them is likely to lead to limited predictions and generalizations. This recognition of the limits of prediction is not confined to the area of personality psychology. The same conclusion has been reached in such diverse analyses as the effects of interview styles in psychotherapy, the impact of teaching practices and classroom arrangements in education, and the role of instructions to aid recall in memory experiments. For example, after a survey of research on memory Jenkins cautions us that: ". . . What is remembered in a given situation depends on the physical and psychological context in which the

event was experienced, the knowledge and skills that the subject brings to the context, the situation in which we ask for evidence for remembering, and the relation of what the subject remembers to what the experimenter demands" (Jenkins, 1974, p. 793). The sentence would be equally apt if we substituted action for memory: thus, what is done (or thought, or felt) in a given situation depends on the physical and psychological context in which the event was experienced, the knowledge and skills that the subject brings to the context, the situation in which we ask for evidence, etc., . . . Identical conclusions probably would be reached for the subject matter of any other subarea of psychology and perhaps throughout the social sciences. Hence it becomes difficult to achieve broad, sweeping generalizations about human behavior; many qualifiers (moderators) must be appended to our "laws" about cause-and-effect relations--almost without exception and perhaps with no exceptions at all (Cronbach, 1975).

Specificity (or "contextualism" to use Jenkins' phrase) may occur because of the large range of different ways that different people may react to the "same" treatments and reinterpret them (e.g., Cronbach, 1975; Neisser, 1974), and because the impact of most situations usually can be changed easily by co-existing conditions (Mischel, 1974). Thus, even a relatively simple "stimulus" or "situation" may produce a variety of often unpredictable specific (and weak) effects depending on a large number of moderating variables and the many different ways in which the particular "subjects" may view them and transform them.

I want to underline that the fact that the details of context--or, if you will, of the situation--crucially affect behavior is as true when one wants to understand how a sentence is recognized or how a geometric pattern is identified as it is in the more global domain of our area of the field. Our colleagues in such areas as cognition and memory and

psycholinguistics are discovering, just as we have, the limits of the generalizations they can achieve and the necessity of taking full account of context in their theorizing. The problems of our area may be more dramatic, but they are not unique.

While the more modest, carefully circumscribed goals, and the predictive limitations, implied by these conclusions appear to depress and discourage some social scientists, I do not share such gloom. On the contrary, more limited, specific, modest goals may be refreshing for a field in which hubris often has exceeded insight. The need to qualify generalizations about human behavior complicates life for the social scientist, but it does not prevent us from studying human affairs scientifically; it only dictates a respect for the complexity of the enterprise and alerts one to the dangers of oversimplifying the nature and causes of human behavior. It should be plain that this danger is equally great whether one is searching for generalized (global) person-free situational effects or for generalized (global) situation-free personality variables. In the context of personality measurement a serious recognition of multiple determinism and interactions has many specific implications, and I want to consider a few of them now.

Multiple goals for measurement

An enduring source of confusion in the area of personality is the failure to specify clearly the goals, purposes or objectives of one's particular enterprise. It is perfectly legitimate, interesting, and appropriate to study what "people are like" (in general), if one is interested in such person perceptions; likewise, it is equally valid to study what "people will do" (in specific situations), if one is interested in that question. Each goal requires different strategies and provides somewhat different--albeit, hopefully, complementary--insights. But there is no reason to

think that one will substitute for the other. The value of each depends in part at least on the investigator's purposes and the types of generalizations one seeks.

It is easy to forget that one may construe the study of persons alternatively from many complementary perspectives. Construed from the viewpoint of the psychologist seeking strategies to induce changes in performance, it may be most useful to focus on the environmental conditions or situations required to modify behavior and therefore to speak of "stimulus control," "operant conditioning," "classical conditioning," "counter conditioning," "reinforcement control," "modeling," etc. Construed from the perspective of the theorist interested in how these operations produce their effects in the individual who undergoes them, it may be more useful to speak of changes in processed information and specifically in competencies, constructs, expectancies, subjective values, rules, and other theoretical person variables that mediate the effects of conditions upon behavior. Construed from the viewpoint of the experiencing subject, it may be more useful to speak of the same events in terms of their phenomenological impact as affects, thoughts, wishes, and other subjective (but communicable) internal states of experience. Confusion arises when one fails to recognize that the same events (e.g., the desensitization of a client's anxieties) may be alternatively construed from each of these perspectives and that the choice of constructions and of measures depends on the construer's purpose. Ultimately, conceptualizations in the field of personality will have to be large enough to encompass the phenomena seen from such multiple perspectives.

In sum, different goals require different foci and measurement strategies, all of which may be legitimate routes for moving toward one's particular objectives. To illustrate more concretely consider, for example, the old but often forgotten differences between norm-centered and person-

centered measurement. Traditionally, most attention in personality measurement has been devoted to comparing differences between people on some norm or standard or dimension selected by the assessor. Such a norm-centered approach compares people against each other, usually on a trait or attribute continuum, e.g., amount of introversion-extraversion. The results can help with gross screening decisions, can permit group comparisons, and can answer many research questions. But a norm-centered objective obviously requires a different strategy than one which is person-centered.

In a person-centered focus one tries to describe the particular individual in relation to the particular psychological conditions of his life. In my view, some especially interesting recent developments in personality measurement have been of this type, arising from clinical work with troubled individuals in the real life setting in which the behaviors of interest unfold naturally. While there are many methodological variations, the essence is a functional analysis that investigates in vivo covariations between changes in the individual and changes in the conditions of his life. The interest here is not in how this person compares to others, but in how he can move closer to his own goals and ideals if he changes his behavior in specific ways as he interacts with the significant people in his life.

In this venture there are many challenges to measurement. Perhaps most important is the fact that clients--like other people--don't describe themselves with operational definitions. They invoke motives, traits, and other dispositions as ways of describing and explaining their experiences and themselves. Much of the assessor's task is to help the client in the search for such referents for the client's own personal constructs, instead of laying on him the assessor's favorite dispositional labels. Rather than leading the client to repackage his problems in our terms, with our con-

structs, we need to help him to objectify his constructs into operational terms, so that the relevant behaviors can be changed by helping him to achieve more judicious arrangements of the conditions of his life.

In my crystal-ball gazing, the future of personality measurement hopefully will include increasingly imaginative and effective versions of such person-centered functional analyses. When done well, they can provide not only a helpful service to people who need it; they also simultaneously offer a testing ground for our theoretical notions about the basic rules that underly behavior. An increasing merging of personality measurement with therapeutic change programs strikes me as one of the more promising elements in the future of the field.

Active organisms interacting in active environments

Both conceptually and methodologically, such therapeutic efforts are closely related to the broader problems of analyzing both behavioral stability and change under in vivo conditions. In the future, measurement hopefully will be directed increasingly at the analysis of naturally occurring behaviors observed in the interactions among people in real life settings. Traditionally, trait-oriented personality research has studied individual differences in response to the "same" situation, usually in the form of test questions. But some of the most striking differences between persons may be found not by studying their responses to the same situation but by analyzing their selection and construction of stimulus conditions. In the conditions of real life the psychological "stimuli" that people encounter are neither questionnaire items, nor experimental instructions, nor inanimate events, but involve people and reciprocal relationships (e.g., with spouse, with boss, with children). We continuously influence the "situations" of our lives as well as being affected by them in a mutual, organic interaction (e.g., Raush, et al., 1974). Such

interactions reflect not only our reactions to conditions but also our active selection and modification of conditions through our own choices, cognitions, and actions (Wachtel, 1973). Different people select different settings for themselves; conversely, the settings that people select to be in may provide clues about their personal qualities (Eddy & Sinnett, 1973). The mutual interaction between person and conditions becomes evident when behavior is studied in the interpersonal contexts in which it is evoked, maintained, and modified.

The study of social interactions vividly reveals how each person continuously selects, changes, and generates conditions just as much as he is affected by them. The future of personality measurement will be brighter if we can move beyond our favorite paper-and-pencil and laboratory measures to include direct observation as well as unobtrusive nonreactive measures to study lives where they are really lived and not merely where it is convenient for the researcher to look at them. In those studies individual differences in preferred situations--in the contexts, environments, and activities different people prefer and select--are sure to be found. Such findings might permit profiles of high and low frequency situations and high and low frequency behaviors somewhat like those supplied by the "interest inventories" of the past.

The subject as expert and colleague

While direct observation is essential for the ecologically valid study of stability and change, I am equally impressed by another point that seems to be emerging from many different research directions: namely, our "subjects" are much smarter than many of us thought they were. Hence, if we don't stop them by asking the wrong questions, and if we provide appropriate structure, they often can tell us much about themselves and, indeed, about

psychology itself.

In some recent pilot work, for example, Harriet Mischel and I have started to ask young children what they know about psychological principles--about how plans can be made and followed most effectively, how longterm work problems can be organized, how delay of gratification can be mastered. We also ask them to tell us about what helps them to learn and (stimulated by Flavell) to remember. Although our results are still very tentative, we are most impressed by how much even an eight-year-old knows about mental functioning. Indeed, one wonders how well such young children might perform on a Psych 1 final exam if the jargon and big words were stripped away. (I do not want to imply, incidentally, that psychology knows little; rather, I believe, people are good psychologists and know a lot. We professionals might be wise to enlist that knowledge in our enterprise.)

The moral, for me, is that it would be wise to allow our "subjects" to slip out of their roles as passive "assessees" or "testees" and to enroll them at least sometimes as active colleagues who are best experts on themselves and eminently qualified to participate in the development of descriptions and predictions--not to mention decisions--about themselves. Of course if we want someone to tell us about himself directly, we have to ask questions that he can answer. If we ask him to predict how he will behave on a future criterion (e.g., "job success," "adjustment") but do not inform him of the specific criterion measure that will constitute the assessment, we cannot expect him to be accurate. Similiarly, it might be possible to use self-reports and self-predictions more extensively in decision making--for example, to help the person to "self-select" from a number of behavioral alternatives (e.g., different types of therapy, different job assignments). Such applications would require conditions in

which the person's accurate self-reports and honest choices cannot be used against him. We might, for example, expect job candidates to predict correctly which job they will perform best, but only when all the alternatives available to them in their choice are structured as equally desirable. We cannot expect people to deny themselves options without appropriate alternatives.

Self-reports will always be constrained by the limits of the individual's own awareness. Too often, however, it has been assumed that people were unaware when in fact they were simply being asked the wrong questions. In the context of verbal conditioning, for example, more careful inquiries suggest that subjects may be far more aware than we thought (e.g., Spielberger & DeNike, 1966). Similarly, while a belief in the prevalence of distortions from unconscious defenses such as repression is the foundation of the commitment to an indirect-sign approach in assessment, the experimental evidence for the potency--and even the existence--of such mechanisms remains remarkably tenuous (e.g., Mischel, 1976). With regard to "subception" and "discrimination without awareness," for example, according to Eriksen (1960), on the basis of much research, it seems that "a verbal report is as sensitive an indicator of perception as any other response that has been studied [p. 298]"--people have not been shown to be more sensitive in their autonomic reactions than in their verbal reports. Thus in laboratory research into unconscious responding, just as in the context of personality testing, what the person tells us directly turns out to be as valuable an index as any other more indirect signs (e.g., his galvanic skin response).

An impressive demonstration of the wisdom of enlisting the "subject's" knowledge of himself to increase predictive power is the recent Bem and

Allen (1974) study. Fully recognizing the discriminativeness that people so often display, Bem and Allen proposed that consistency may characterize some people at least in some areas of behavior. They suggested that while some people may be consistent on some traits, practically nobody is consistent on all traits; indeed, many traits that are studied by investigators may be completely irrelevant for many of the people who are studied. To get beyond this problem they tried to identify (preselect) those college students who would be consistent and those who would not be consistent on the traits of friendliness and conscientiousness. Their hypothesis was simply this: "Individuals who identify themselves as consistent on a particular trait dimension will in fact be more consistent cross-situationally than those who identify themselves as highly variable" (Bem & Allen, 1974, p. 512). On the whole, their results supported the hypothesis, demonstrating consistency for "some of the people some of the time." To me it is most interesting that it was the people themselves who predicted their own consistency, again providing support for the notion that each person knows his or her own behavior best.

The search for sub-types of people who display consistencies on some well-defined dimensions of behavior under some sub-types of conditions represents a more modest (and much more reasonable) search for personality typologies. To the degree that such typologies are carefully moderated (qualified) and take account of types of situations as well as types of people, they are likely to be more successful (albeit more limited) than their more global and ambitious ancestors.

The analysis of environments

In the future many of us are sure to continue searching for cross-situationally consistent types of people, but others seem to be focusing

increasingly on the social and psychological environments in which people live and function. The dramatic rise of interest in the environment as it relates to man is documented easily; from 1968 to 1972 more books appeared on the topic of man-environment relations from an ecological perspective than had been published in the prior three decades (Jordan, 1972). As is true in most new fields, a first concern in the study of environments is to try to classify them into a taxonomy. Environments, like all other events, of course, can be classified in many ways, depending mainly on the purposes and imagination of the classifiers. One typical effort to describe some of the almost infinite dimensions of environments, proposed by Moos (1973, 1974), calls attention to the complex nature of environments and to the many variables that can characterize them. Those variables include the weather, the buildings and settings, the perceived social climates, and the reinforcements obtained for behaviors in that situation--to list just a few.

The classification alerts us to a fact that has been slighted by traditional trait-oriented approaches to personality: much human behavior depends on environmental considerations, such as the setting (e.g., Barker, 1968), and even on such specific physical and psychosocial variables as how hot and crowded the setting is, or how the room and furniture are arranged, or how the people in the setting are organized (e.g., Krasner & Ullmann, 1973; Moos & Insel, 1974). Many links between characteristics of the environment and behavior have been demonstrated. For example, measures of population density (such as the number of people in each room) may be related to certain forms of aggression (even when social class and ethnicity are controlled: Galle, Gove, & McPhersen, 1972). Likewise, interpersonal attraction and mood are negatively affected by extremely

hot, crowded conditions (Griffitt & Veitch, 1971).

Depending on one's purpose, many different classifications are possible and useful (e.g., Magnusson & Ekehammer, 1973; Moos, 1973, 1974). To seek any single "basic" taxonomy of situations may be as futile as searching for a final or ultimate taxonomy of traits: we can label situations in at least as many different ways as we can label people. It will be important to avoid emerging simply with a trait psychology of situations, in which events and settings, rather than people, are merely given different labels. The task of naming situations cannot substitute for the job of analyzing how conditions and environments interact with the people in them.

Although person-condition interactions are never static, sometimes environmental variables can be identified which help to explain continuities in behavior and allow useful predictions. Of course the psychology of personality cannot ignore the person; nevertheless behavior sometimes may be predicted and influenced efficaciously from knowledge of powerful stimulus conditions (Mischel, 1968). The value of predictions based on knowledge of stimulus conditions is illustrated, for instance, in efforts to predict the post-hospital adjustment of mental patients. Such investigations have shown that the type, as well as the severity, of psychiatric symptoms depended significantly on environmental conditions, with little consistency in behavior across changing situations (Ellsworth et at., 1968). Accurate predictions of post-hospital adjustment require knowledge of the environment in which the ex-patient will be living in the community--such as the availability of jobs and family support--rather than on any measured person variables or in-hospital behavior (e.g., Fairweather, 1967; Fairweather et. al., 1969). Likewise, to predict intellectual achievement it also helps to take account of the degree to which the child's environ-

ment supports (models and reinforces) intellectual development (Wolf, 1966). And when powerful treatments are developed--such as modeling and desensitization therapies for phobias--predictions about outcomes are best when based on knowing the treatment to which the individual is assigned (e.g., Bandura, Blanchard, & Ritter, 1969). In the same vein, the significance of the psychological situation was vividly demonstrated in the simulated prison study conducted by Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973).

Person variables

But while some situations are powerful, when relevant situational information is absent or minimal, or when predictions are needed about individual differences in response to the same conditions, and when situational variables are weak, information about person variables becomes essential. Moreover, a psychological approach requires that we move from descriptions of the environment--of the climate, buildings, social settings, etc., in which we live--to the psychological processes through which environmental conditions and people influence each other reciprocally. For this purpose, it is necessary to study in depth how the environment influences behavior and how behavior and the people who generate it in turn shape the environment in an endless interaction. To understand the interaction of person and environment we must consider person variables as well as environmental variables.

The person variables that in my view demand more research in the future must subsume such cognitive work as information processing with all its many ramifications. They include selective attention and encoding, rehearsal and storage processes, cognitive transformations and the active construction of cognitions and actions (Bandura, 1971; Mischel, 1973; Neisser, 1967). Elsewhere I have proposed a synthesis of seemingly promising constructs

about persons developed in the areas of cognition and social learning (Mischel, 1973); hence they are called "cognitive social learning person variables." The selections were intended as suggestive and constantly open to progressive revisions. These variables were not expected to provide ways to predict accurately broad cross-situational behavioral differences between persons. In my view, the discriminativeness of behavior and its unique organization within each person are facts of nature, not limitations specific to particular theories. But hopefully these variables may suggest useful ways of conceptualizing and studying specifically how the qualities of the person influence the impact of stimuli ("environments," "situations," "treatments") and how each person generates distinctive complex behavior patterns in interaction with the conditions of his or her life.

To summarize very briefly, first, individuals differ in their cognitive and behavioral construction competencies, i.e., in their competence or ability to generate desired cognitions and response patterns. Differences in behavior also may reflect differences in how individuals categorize a particular situation. Obviously people differ in how they encode, group, and label events and in how they construe themselves and others. Performance differences in any situation depend on differences in expectancies and specifically on differences in the expected outcomes associated with particular response patterns and stimulus configurations. Differences in performance also may be due to differences in the subjective values of the expected outcomes in the situation. Finally, individual differences often may reflect differences in the self-regulatory systems and plans that each individual brings to the situation. The study of this person variable will require analyses of the rules people use to guide their own behavior; it will also require investigation of how people pursue their longterm goals and

select and transform stimulus conditions.

Toward a research-based image of man?

Traditionally most theorists of personality have invoked a few concepts and stretched them to encompass all the phenomena of human individuality, including thought, feeling, and behavior. As a result, we have theories of personality built on a few body types, or on a handful of factors, or on simple conditioning and environmental contingencies, or on the vicissitudes of one or more favorite motives--sex, aggression, competence, achievement, dissonance, self-realization--or on a humanism that correctly emphasizes man's humanity but too easily loses sight of (or perhaps interest in?) its antecedents. The list is long but the strategy is the same: take a few concepts and stretch them as far as possible. This may be a valuable exercise for the theorist interested in defending his favorite concepts. For the teacher it may provide a handy set of controversies in which any one set of obviously incomplete, fragmentary ideas may be sharply contrasted against any other, with each sure to be found sorely lacking in at least some crucial ways. But for the psychologist who seeks a cumulative science of psychology based on the incremental empirical discoveries of the field, rather than on the biases of theoreticians committed to defending their viewpoint, it leaves dreadful voids.

To help overcome these voids will require a conception of personality that, at the least, is nourished broadly by the research of the field. The massiveness of available data, and their frequent flaws, of course, make it possible to read them in many different ways. In my reading, however, a distinctive image of man does begin to emerge from empirical work on cognition and social behavior.

One strand of this research suggests that the individual generally is

capable of being his own best assessor; that the person's own self-statements and self-predictions tend to be at least as good as the more indirect and costly appraisals of sophisticated tests and clinicians (e.g., reviewed in Mischel, 1968, 1972). A related theme is that the individual's awareness of the contingencies in the situation--his (or her) understanding (not the psychologist's) of what behavior leads to what outcome--is a crucial determinant of the resulting actions and choices, including behavior in the classical and instrumental conditioning paradigms (as discussed in Mischel, 1973). In the same vein, any given objective stimulus condition may have a variety of effects, depending on how the individual construes and transforms it (e.g., Mischel, 1974).

While these research themes focus on the centrality of each individual's interpretations, there is also much evidence for the potency and regularity of the effects that may be achieved when the rules of behavior are applied--with the individual's full cooperation and by the individual--to achieve desired outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 1969). There is also considerable support, in my view, that while consistencies surely exist within each person, they tend to be idiosyncratically organized (e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974), making nomothetic comparisons on common traits difficult and highlighting the uniqueness which Gordon Allport has so long emphasized.

Taken collectively, these and related research themes suggest an emerging image of man which seems to reflect a growing synthesis of several theoretical influences in current personality psychology. It is an image that seems compatible with many qualities of both the behavioral and the cognitive phenomenological approaches to personality and yet one that departs from each in some respects.

This image is one of the human being as an active, aware problem-solver,

capable of profiting from an enormous range of experiences and cognitive capacities, possessed of great potential for good or ill, actively constructing his or her psychological world, influencing the environment but also being influenced by it in lawful ways--even if the laws are difficult to discover and hard to generalize. It views the person as so complex and multi-faceted as to defy easy classifications and comparisons on any single or simple common dimensions, as multiply influenced by a host of determinants, as uniquely organized on the basis of prior experiences and future expectations, and yet as open to study by the methods of science, and continuously responsive to stimulus conditions in meaningful ways. It is an image that has moved a long way from the instinctual drive-reduction models, the static global traits, and the automatic stimulus-response bonds of traditional personality theories. It is an image that highlights the shortcomings of all simplistic theories that view behavior as the exclusive result of any narrow set of determinants, whether these are habits, traits, drives, constructs, instincts, genes, and whether these are exclusively inside or outside the person. It will be exciting to watch this image change as new research alters our understanding of what it is to be a human being--and how our humanness changes or maintains itself in relation to the psychological conditions of our lives.

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